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17½.66

Bd. Apr. 1875

US 4560.19

The Gift of
Sam'l A. Green, M.D.
of Boston.
(H. U. 1851.)
21 Nov. 1874.

Isaiah Thomas

LIFE OF ISAIAH THOMAS.

BY HIS GRANDSON

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN THOMAS.

BOSTON.
1874.

MEMOIR OF ISAIAH THOMAS,

BY HIS GRANDSON

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN THOMAS.

BOSTON.
1874.

7325.33
U.S.C. 53.19

1874, Nov. 21.
Gift of
Chas'l A. Flagg, M.D.

MUNSELL, PRINTER.

ALBANY.

MEMOIR.

"On the 5th of June, 1632," says Governor Winthrop, "arrived in Boston the ship William and Francis, Mr. Thomas master, with about fifty passengers—whereof Mr. Welde and old Mr. Batchelor (being aged 71) were with their families and many other honest men." This Mr. Thomas, master, was, I believe, Evan Thomas, who in 1639 or 1640 settled in the colony of Massachusetts Bay.

The first notice of him upon the colony records is of September 1st, 1640. "Evan Thomas, having a wife and four children, is allowed twenty bushels of corne at harvest." He was admitted a freeman of the colony in 1641, and a member of the Artillery Company in 1652. Evan was a successful vintner, paying into the colony treasury from twenty to forty pounds a year for licence or duty or as his proportion of the "rents of wine." We are sorry to have discovered any stain upon his escutcheon; but we find on the General Court record this entry, October 17th, 1654. "Lieut. Hudson and Evan Thomas having been ffined for selling beere above two pence the quart and also fforfeited bond for appearance at the Court of Assistance to answer the same; this court upon their pet, thinkes meet to

remitt their bonds, but se no cause to take off their ffines." Occasionally, like more modern merchants and vintners, Evan seems to have dabbled in speculation outside of his regular line of business. In the Suffolk Registry of deeds, vol. 2d, p. 192, is recorded a receipt by Isaac Allerton Senior (one of the principal men of Plymouth colony and its first assistant) dated New Haven, Nov. 29th, 1653, for one hogshead and four barrels of mackerel from Evan Thomas, vintner, of Boston, to adventure for half profits. Evan died August 25th, 1661.

It is the family tradition that Peter Thomas, the grandfather of Isaiah Thomas, was the grandson of Evan. Peter, the eldest son of George and Rebecca Thomas, was born in Boston February 1st, 1682. He married Elizabeth Burroughs the daughter of the Rev. George Burroughs, who in August, 1692, was hung at Salem as a witch. The only evidence of his guilt consisted in the fact that though of rather small stature and frame he had remarkable physical strength. The thorough research and careful judgment of Mr. Upham leave him as man and Christian minister without stain or reproach. He was the victim, not of fanataicism, but of malice and perjury. Peter was a merchant and acquired a good estate. He owned a store and carried on his business on the town dock.

Peter's fourth son was Moses Thomas, soldier, mariner, trader, farmer, and schoolmaster. Without the consent or knowledge of his father, in 1740 he enlisted as common soldier in the expedition against Cuba. His father, after futile efforts to procure his discharge, secured him the position of clerk of one of the officers. He was one of the few who escaped the sword, and the more wasting pestilence of that disastrous expedition. On his return he sailed on

a voyage to the Mediterranean. Afterwards, for some years, he was a school master at Hampstead, Long Island. Weary of teaching the "young idea how to shoot," he bought and cultivated a farm at Hampstead. Soon tired of this he became a trader and kept a store in the village. He was not an exception to the adage; he gathered no moss. It was while living in Hampstead, that he met, fell in love with, and married Fidelity Grant. Fidelity was a native of Rhode Island. Her father was a merchant of that colony, trading to Philadelphia and the West Indies. Dying and leaving his business in a very unsettled condition, his widow, taking the daughter with her, went to the West Indies and thence to Philadelphia to settle his estate. They had relatives in Hampstead, and on their return went there to reside. Moses remained at Long Island some three or four years after his marriage and then returned to Boston. Trying many things, holding fast to none, he wasted a few years in Boston, and then went to seek fortune in North Carolina, where he died in 1752.

His father, an active, stable, frugal merchant, a solid man of Boston, not relishing the roving life and infirm purpose of his son, made a will in which he cut him off with five shillings. Though the father survived the son, he died without altering his will, and the widow and children of Moses were left entirely destitute. Two children, born at Hampstead, had been left with the relatives of their mother at that place. The relatives had become much attached to, and desired to retain them. The circumstances of the mother obliged her to acquiesce. We shall not appreciate the sacrifice required of this young mother of twenty-six years, unless we understand how entire the separation was. In 1752, and till after the revolution, there

was no communication from Long Island by mail to any part of the continent. Opportunities for the private conveyance of letters seldom occurred, the mother could not afford the expense of visiting her children, and the result was that, for many years together, she did not hear from them.

Three children born after the return to Boston remained under the mother's care. She had the energy and business capacity wanting in the father. She had no money, but she had friends ready to help her in the best way, by enabling her to help herself. Women then engaged in active outside business more frequently than now. It was a quite common thing for widows, especially of printers, innkeepers, and traders, to take up and carry on the husband's trade, and not uncommon for them to set up business of their own. The friends of this young widow loaned her money with which to open a small shop.

Putting her children to board in the near country, she devoted herself to their support. By industry and frugality she was able to do this and something more. Little by little she laid by enough to purchase a small estate in Cambridge. This, she ultimately lost. Having a large price offered for it in Continental paper, and having faith that these paper promises would sooner or later be transmuted into silver and gold, she sold house and land and, the story is short, was one of the thousands of victims of paper money. She was however never reduced to want, but lived to a good old age to witness the success of her son and to share the fruits of it.

Isaiah Thomas, the youngest son of Fidelity and Moses, was born January 19th, 1749, old style. At the age of six years he was brought home to Boston. If he was ever in

a schoolhouse it was before his return. He used to say that six weeks "schooling" was all he ever had, and poor at that. The mother meant the boy should have the common school education of the time, be taught to read, write, and cipher, and be trained to some mechanical pursuit.

There was in Boston in 1755, Zechariah Fowle, a printer and pedler of ballads and small books; it was the custom of that day to hawk about the streets new publications. Mr. Fowle, having no children desired to take Isaiah. He promised the mother that he would treat the child as his own, give him a good school education, instruct him in the art of printing, and if, when arriving at the age of fourteen, the boy did not wish to remain with him, he should be at liberty to choose another place and trade. The lad had been with him about a year, when Mr. Fowle persuaded the mother to have him bound to him as an apprentice. The writer has before him the original indenture of apprenticeship, bearing date June 4th, 1756. Its principal provisions it may be well to give, not only as an illustration of the usages of the time, but to enable us to judge how far, in his dealings with the boy, the covenants of the master were kept. After fixing the time the apprenticeship was to continue — to the age of twenty-one — the conditions of the service to Fowle and his wife and heirs are thus stated: "During all which said time or term, the said apprentice, his said master and mistress, well and faithfully shall serve; their secrets he shall keep close; their commandments lawful and honest everywhere he shall gladly obey; he shall do no damage to his said master, etc., nor suffer it to be done by others without letting or giving seasonable notice thereof to his said master, etc.; he shall not waste the goods of his said master, etc., nor lend them

unlawfully to any; at cards, dice, or any other unlawful game or games he shall not play; fornication he shall not commit; matrimony during the said term he shall not contract; taverns, alehouses or places of gaming he shall not haunt or frequent; from the service of his said master, etc., by day nor night he shall not absent himself; but in all things and at all times he shall carry and behave himself towards his said master, etc., and all theirs, as a good and faithful apprentice ought to do, to his utmost ability during all the time or term aforesaid." The covenants of the master, if not so comprehensive are equally plain and explicit. "And the said master doth hereby covenant and agree for himself, his wife and heirs, to teach or cause to be taught the said apprentice, by the best way and means he can, the art and mistery of a printer, also to read, write and cypher; and also shall and will well and truly find, allow unto, and provide for the said appprentice, sufficient and wholesome meat and drink, with washing lodging and apparrell, and other necessaries meet and convenient for such an apprentice, during all the time or term aforesaid; and at the end or expiration thereof shall dismiss the said apprentice with two good suits of apparrell for all parts of his body, one for the Lord's day, the other for working days, suitable to his degree."

Mr. Fowle had a small printing office and shop on Middle street, near Cross street. His printing apparatus consisted of one press, one font of small pica of about three hundred and fifty pounds, about two hundred pounds of English and one hundred pounds of double pica. The library of the office was made up of a "tattered dictionary and an inkstained Bible." The master was a singular man, irritable and rather effeminate. With little industry, and no

enterprise, he was honest and did work enough to support himself and wife. He was in debt for his press and types when he began business, and he seemed to be equally careful not to increase nor diminish the debt.

Having got the boy into his power, the master, as the apprentice always charged, put the lad to all the servile work he had strength to do, and when such work was wanting set him up to the type cases. Such statements are to be taken with some grains of allowance, especially when made as to a master on whose ignorance and want of capacity the boy early learned to look with contempt. The call upon the boy for services which he regarded as menial was not unusual in the relation of master and apprentice at that period. The boy, if a member of the master's family, was expected to do the "chores."

Mr. Thomas has left in print, and in brief memoranda before me, a few anecdotes which may enable us to see something of the interior of that little printing office, and to learn with how small help and aid he grew up to manhood. In order that the child, of seven years, might reach the boxes to set types, he was mounted on a bench eighteen inches high and of the length of a double frame, which contained cases of the roman and italic. His first essay with the composing stick was on a ballad called the *Lawyer's Pedigree*, the licentious character of which gives us an idea of the taste and sense of the master and his interest in the moral welfare of the boy. The child set the types for this ballad (double pica) in two days, "though he knew then only the letters and had not been taught to put them together and spell."

The skill of the master and his capacity to teach the "art and mistery of printing" are well illustrated in the following

story. A young man, a barber's apprentice, illiterate, but as he fondly believed a favorite child of the Muses, composed a poem on the proposed expedition of the British and Provincial troops against Ticonderoga and Crown Point. Unable to write legibly, the poet recited his verse to a friend whose pen put it into black and white. It was sent to Mr. Fowle to be printed as quickly as possible. Fowle began to set the types, the boy at work near him. He had set but a line, when he discovered the absence of punctuation in the manuscript. The hurried Muse had made no stop from beginning to end. The master was in sore distress. He had a friend to whom he used to apply for aid and direction, but this friend could not be found. His genius suggested to him a mode of relief quite original. He went to his shelves of ballads, took one that he thought would answer his purpose, and, placing it by the side of his manuscript, put at the end of every line of the barber's poem the same point that was in the ballad. That the subject, composition and metre of the poem did not even faintly resemble those of the ballad seems to have given him no pause. Young and ignorant as the pupil was, he viewed the proceeding with surprise. He tells us that with the mechanical part of his work the master had but little more acquaintance than with the rules of punctuation.

The master never taught the child to read, write, or cypher, nor caused it to be done by others. His only essay at teaching was a weekly lesson, on the Sabbath, in the Assembly's Catechism. This was by rote merely. "I recollect," said the pupil, "his putting me the question from the catechism 'What are the decrees of God;' I answered I could not tell, and then, boy-like, asked him what they were. He read the answer from the book. I was of

opinion he knew as little about the matter as myself." Poor boy! very likely, and as many wiser boys and wiser men before and since.

For three years, from 1758 to 1761, Mr. Fowle had a partner, Samuel Draper, a good printer and kind man, from whom the lad got some valuable instruction in the art. During the partnership the business was not confined to ballads and pamphlets, but some books were printed, as *Janeway's Heaven on Earth*, *Watts's Psalms*, and a large edition of the *Youth's Instructor*, a spelling book in general use at the time. The spelling book and Watts, the boy fully mastered, the "Heaven on Earth" he failed to attain. Fowle and Draper did not get along very smoothly, and to the sorrow and loss of the boy the partnership was dissolved. Thomas was then about twelve years old, and from this time seems to have had the principal charge of the business of the office. He did the work in his own way, corrected the press as well as he could, and when the form was ready, Fowle having no other help, assisted him at the press.

At this period there were few persons in Boston who could "cut" on wood or type metal. Thomas Fleet, the printer of the *Boston Evening Post*, was also a rival of Fowle in the printing of ballads. Fleet had a negro who illustrated his ballads by cuts. Young Thomas was induced to try his hand in decorating those printed by Fowle. He "cut" about an hundred plates, rude and coarse indeed, "but nearly a match," he says, "for those done by the negro."

The young printer found friends outside of the office. Among those whom he held in grateful remembrance was

an old man by the name of Gamaliel Rogers. Gamaliel had been a printer of the firm of Rogers and Fowle, who printed the first edition in America of the New Testament in the English language. The work had to be done secretly, and to bear the imprint of the London copy from which it was reprinted, to avoid prosecution from those who in England and Scotland published the Bible by a patent from the Crown, or *cum privilegio*, as did the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Rogers's printing office was destroyed by fire and he lost most of his property. With the little that was left, he, in his old age, set up a little shop opposite the (now old) South Church. Thomas used to go frequently to his store, and the old printer was very kind to him, gave him some of the books which he had printed, and what Mr. Thomas used to say was of much more value to him, "he admonished me, diligently to attend to my business, that I might become a reputable printer. I held him in high veneration and often recalled his instructions, which on many occasions proved beneficial to me."

This entrance upon the way and work of life is not promising, but the spirit, energy, and strength of will of the boy will make way for him. There is in him the germ of a noble manhood, and in the school of early struggle and narrowest fortune he will develop it. The printing office, as the history of our country has abundantly shown, is one of the best of schools, and printing the most encyclopedic of arts. In helping to diffuse knowledge the printer acquires it; in lighting the torch for others, he kindles his own. Self-developed, he will be strongly developed. We are apt in our day to over-value the facilities of culture; there may be too much dandling and nursing. Vigor and

self-reliance come from effort and trial. The tattered dictionary, the ink-stained Bible, the spelling book and Watts's Psalms; there is food enough in these for large and vigorous growth.

Thomas continued in the service of Mr. Fowle ten or eleven years. In this time he had acquired the elementary branches of learning, could think for himself, write good, plain English, with a dash of satire in it, put his thought in type without writing, and make, so he told the writer, tolerable verses for the poet's corner. He made the most diligent use of the means and opportunities within his reach to learn the art of printing. He was esteemed at the age of seventeen an excellent workman. He loved the art, and had an earnest desire to go to London to perfect himself in it. In his old age he used to say that if he could live his life over again, and choose his employment, it would be that of a printer. He evinced quite early a strong taste for reading, and a fondness of theatrical entertainments — private they must have been for there was then no theatre in Boston. Tall and handsome in person, of attractive manners, neat and careful in his dress, the young printer impressed favorably the men, and most favorably the women, with whom he was brought in contact. He had fitted himself to do useful work in the world, and there was work for him to do.

At three different times in early boyhood his life was in imminent peril. On one of the occasions (1756), he was playing with a young boy in a woodshed, where there was a large cistern of rain water, left at the time uncovered. The boy pushing young Thomas with a stick, he fell back into the cistern. His companion was too much frightened to assist or even to give notice of what he had done. Mean-

time the little printer was drowning. There was near to the shed a tallow chandler's shop. An aged negro, Boston Peckens, at work in the shop, somehow or other discovered that the boy was in the cistern and came to his rescue. By means of the pole with a hook on the end of it, used to draw the bucket of water from the cistern, he brought him to the surface and took him out. He was insensible, but with the help of rubbing and other appliances was restored. Thomas, grateful to his kind preserver, used to express his deep regret that the old man died before it was in his power to give him any substantial proof of his gratitude.

About a year after this, the lad was standing at an oyster board on the town dock, before it was filled up. A man called for oysters. The oyster vender, having no bread, the buyer asked the lad to go to a shop and get him a biscuit; and the weather being unpleasant, went on board the oyster vessel to eat his oysters. The boy returning with his biscuit tried to jump on board. Not springing far enough he fell into the water. It was dark, and he was nearly drowned before he was discovered. The gentleman impatient for his biscuit came on deck to look for his messenger. He heard a noise in the water and the first thing he saw was the biscuit, by which he judged the boy was not far off. He was soon found, taken up and carried home.

The third of these accidents, in 1758 or 1759, so connects itself with the manners of the time that it may be well to state it with some detail. Nowhere in the British dominions was the fifth of November, the anniversary of the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot, celebrated with more zeal and zest, and mock pomp and ceremony, than in the good town of Boston. Strife and rivalry had for sometime

existed between the north and south ends of the town, which should have the more august celebration and soonest put to rout the procession and parade of the other. The line of division between the North and the South was the old Mill creek, now Blackstone street. Collections were levied upon the inhabitants on the morning of the day; *asked for*, but few thought it quite safe to refuse. The money was spent in part for the pomp and circumstance of war, and largely for liquor. The principal effigies of the pope and the devil, the supposed instigators of the plot, were placed upon a stage mounted on cart wheels and drawn by horses. At the front of the stage was a large lantern of oiled paper, four or five feet wide and eight or nine feet high. On the front was painted in large letters, "The devil take the pope;" and just below this "North end forever" or "South end forever." Behind the lantern sat the pope in an arm chair, and behind the pope was the devil standing erect with extended arms, one hand holding a smaller lantern, the other grasping a pitchfork. The heads of pope and devil were on poles which went through their bodies and the stage beneath. Boxed up out of sight sat a boy whose mission was to sway the heads from side to side as fancy suggested. The devil, without consideration for his home climate, was clad in tar and feathers "from top to toe," "from head to foot." Other effigies were sometimes seen, suspended from gallows, of persons who had incurred the indignation and hatred of the mob, as the Pretender, Admiral Byng, Earl Bute, and Lord North. Ancillary devils and popes were drawn or carried by men and boys, as various in size as the men and boys who bore them; some even on shingles and bits of board.

Assembling about dusk, North end and South end under

their respective leaders, processions were formed, the lanterns, great and small, lighted, and through a speaking trumpet the order was given to "move on." With this the noise and tumult began, the blowing of conch shells, whistling through the fingers, beating with clubs the sides of the houses, cheering, huzzaing, swearing, and rising above all the din the cry "North end forever" or "South end forever." The devils on the stages were not the only or chiefest proof that the under world was let loose. The procession that first reached the Mill creek gave three cheers and rushed on to meet their foes. As they approached the strife began; clubs, stones, and brickbats were freely used, and though persons were not often killed, bruised shins, broken heads and bones, were not infrequent.

It was on one of these "peaceful nights" when the North-enders had been as far south as the elm tree, soon after so well known as the Liberty Tree, and were on their return, masters of the situation, though now and then receiving a complimentary brick from South-enders secreted in lane or passage way, that our little printer, with a large bump of curiosity and a small one of caution, pressed through the crowd to read the labels on the lanterns. A brick aimed at the lantern, lighted on his head and struck him to the ground. The chances were for the little fellow to be trampled to death by the rushing crowd, but as his good fortune or a kind Providence would have it, the first man whose foot struck him, hearing his groans lifted him up, and persons coming around with lights, one of them recognized him, took him in his arms, and carried him to his master's house. A surgeon being sent for, it was found that no bone was broken, and in a few days he was able to return to his types. Such is in substance the account given

by Mr. Thomas in later years. It does not speak very well for the refinement of manners of what was then the most cultivated town of British America, and is worth perhaps the passing notice of those who are continually asking "why the former days were better than these."

In 1766, between 17 and 18 years of age, the apprentice had what he called a "serious fracas" with his master. I can throw no light upon the cause, merits or demerits, of the quarrel. Thomas left Boston secretly, taking passage for Halifax, with the hope of finding his way from Halifax to London, to acquire a more perfect knowledge of printing. In this he was wholly disappointed. So far from obtaining the means of going to England it was difficult to earn his daily bread. He found work and wages to pay board and lodging with one Anthony Henry. Henry was a good-natured, heavy moulded Dutchman, who had been a printer in his youth, but left his master and came to Halifax as fifer in a British regiment. There being no printing office in the province, Henry got discharged from military service and set up the business. It might not seem the easiest thing in the world for a fifer to find means to purchase press and types. But there was a pastry cook in Halifax, of African descent, who had acquired a snug little property. Henry married her, endowed himself with her wordly goods, and with them purchased printing materials and built a house. Some three years after the marriage the pastry-cook died without issue. The relict was left in comfortable condition. He was a cheerful, good natured fellow, not very skillful in his art, and loving his ease. He was at the time of Thomas's arrival the printer and publisher of the *Halifax Gazette*, and government printer. The master indolent, and the young man ambitious and willing to

work, the editing and printing the *Gazette* soon fell into his hands. He is found quite competent to the task. He remodelled the paper as well as he could with the means he had, and went to work.

Thomas was fresh from the debates of Boston, and brought with him the Boston notions of liberty. The *Gazette* soon after his arrival was printed on stamped paper. Thomas could not brook this, and a paragraph appeared in its columns stating that "the people of the province were disgusted with the stamp act." The paragraph gave great offence to the loyal government of that loyal province, and Henry was called to account for printing sedition. He had not even seen the paper in which the seditious paragraph was published, and pleaded ignorance, saying that the paper in his absence was conducted by his journeyman. He was reprimanded, and threatened with the loss of the public printing if anything of the kind should again be found in his columns.

The young patriot could not keep quiet, and, soon after, a paragraph of the same import appeared. This time the master pleaded that he had been confined to his house by sickness, and made a most humble apology. The young journeyman was sent for by the secretary of the province. He was probably not known to the secretary, who sternly asked him what he wanted.

A. Nothing, sir.

Q. Why came you here?

A. Because I was sent for.

Q. What is your name?

A. Isaiah Thomas.

Q. Are you the young New England man that prints for Henry?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. How dare you publish in the *Gazette* that the people of Nova Scotia were displeased with the Stamp Act.

A. I thought it was true.

Secretary. You had no right to think so. If you publish any more of such stuff you shall be punished. You may go, but remember you are not in New England.

T. I will, sir.

Not long after the interview the year's stock of stamped paper for the *Gazette*, some six reams only, arrived from England. It was soon discovered that the paper had been denuded of the stamps, and in the next *Gazette* was a notice that "all the stamped paper had been used, and as no more could be had the paper would in future be published without stamps."

A few days later a vessel came from Philadelphia bringing the newspapers published in that city, among others the *Pennsylvania Journal* in full mourning for the passage of the Stamp Act. Thick black lines surrounded the pages and were placed between the columns. A death's head and cross-bones were over the title, and at the bottom of the last page was the figure of a coffin, beneath which was printed the age of the paper with the statement that it had died of a disorder called the Stamp Act. Thomas wished to do the like with the *Gazette*. To do it directly was a little too hazardous. As near an imitation was made of the *Journal* as possible, and the *Gazette* appeared with this notice. "We are desired by a number of our readers to give a description of the extraordinary appearance of the *Pennsylvania Journal* of the 30th of October last (1765). We can in no better way comply with their request than

by the exemplification we have given of that *Journal* in this day's *Gazette.*" The publication made no small stir in the town, but led to no immediate action.

One morning soon after, an effigy of the stamp master and one of Lord Bute were found suspended on the public gallows, behind the citadel. The officers of the government, who had prided themselves upon the good behavior of the province, were dismayed. Somehow or other a suspicion prevailed that the young printer from Boston might have some knowledge of the matter. A sheriff thereupon went to the printing office and told Thomas he had a precept against him and meant to take him to prison unless he gave information of the persons engaged in the transaction. The sheriff stated some circumstances which had convinced him that Thomas himself had been engaged in these seditious proceedings. Thomas making no reply to the kind suggestions, the sheriff ordered him to go with him before a magistrate. In the simplicity of his heart he was about to go, when it occurred to him that the action of the sheriff might be merely intended to alarm him into an acknowledgment of his privity with the seditious acts. He thereupon told the sheriff that he had not the pleasure of knowing him, and demanded to be told by what authority he acted. The sheriff replied that he had sufficient authority. On being requested to show it, the officer was evidently disconcerted, but answered he would show his authority when necessary, and again ordered the "printer of sedition," as he was pleased to call him, to go with him. Thomas replied he would not obey unless the sheriff produced his precept or proper authority for taking him prisoner. After further parley the officer left him with the assurance that he would soon return; but Thomas

saw him no more, and afterwards learned that this was a plan concerted for the purpose of surprising him into confession. There was too old a head on those young shoulders for such a trap.

Such, in substance, is the narrative Mr. Thomas left us of his sojourn at Halifax. He has not in this history disclosed the circumstances of extreme poverty to which he was reduced. He used to say, not without satisfaction in the contrast with his affluent condition in later life, that his linen was reduced to one check shirt, and that the only coat he had he sent to a tailor to turn, and the tailor ran away with it.

Henry had no little liking for his young and quick-witted journeyman, but it became plain that he must part with him or with the government business, and Thomas, after seven months' residence, left Halifax in a New England sloop bound for Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The compensations of life are greater than men think. In what school or university could a boy of eighteen years have got so much or so valuable training, discipline, and self-reliance, as this young printer got in that obscure newspaper office in Halifax.

On his arrival at Portsmouth the people were celebrating with great enthusiasm the repeal of the Stamp Act. His presence at Portsmouth was suspected by his Boston friends by the remodelling and improvement in the newspaper on which he worked, which must have been either the *New Hampshire Gazette*, printed by Daniel and Robert Fowle, or the *Portsmouth Mercury*, printed by Furber and Russell. Mr. Fowle learns that he is in Portsmouth, and invites him to return to Boston. He comes back and goes to his old master, who fails to recognize him. He returns to his

service and gets along quietly for a few weeks. In July 1766, on the day of the funeral of Jonathan Mayhew, whom the whole town followed to his grave, he has fresh trouble, but the difficulty is compromised and he lives with him once more. He remains but a few weeks and then, with the full consent of his master, leaves his service finally.

Young as he was he seems to have thought of setting up for himself. On the look out for place and opportunity, he receives an invitation from a captain of a vessel to go with him to Wilmington, North Carolina, where, he was assured, a printer was wanted. With all the new facilities of intercourse it would require no little pluck now for a youth of eighteen to leave Boston and go to North Carolina to establish himself in business; especially if he had neither friends there nor money. But the young man had more courage than prudence or stability. Industrious, enterprising, and fearless, he had yet to acquire the steadiness of will and purpose which afterwards characterized him and assured success.

A violent storm compelled the captain to put in for a while at Holmes Hole at the Vineyard. From this port he went to Newport, and took in, as a passenger, Martin Howard who, during the excitement of the Stamp Act, had been hung in effigy at Newport, his house destroyed and his person injured. Howard was afterwards appointed chief justice of North Carolina, and used to say he had no quarrel with the "Sons of Liberty" at Newport, for they had made him chief justice of North Carolina, with a thousand pounds sterling a year. On the voyage the young printer got acquainted with the future judge, who advised him (advice costs nothing) to set up a press in Wilmington, and promised him his countenance and support. On going

ashore at Wilmington, Thomas was introduced, by the captain of the ship, to a lady who kept a coffee-house in the town, and who seems to have been greatly impressed, if not charmed, by the young New England man. The good lady proposes to him a partnership in business, he to print and publish a newspaper, she to keep the coffee house, and the profits of the two concerns to be equally divided between them. Whether the partnership was to be further extended does not appear. Under the advice of Mr. Howard, and other gentlemen, young Thomas waited upon Lieutenant Gov. Tryon, then acting governor of the colony, afterwards famous and infamous in the history of the revolution. The governor encouraged him to remain, and flattered him that he should be favored with a part of the government printing. It may be doubted whether Mr. Howard or the governor knew much of the young man's opinions or recent history.

There was, as before suggested, a somewhat formidable difficulty in his setting up the business of printing in Wilmington or elsewhere. He had not press, or types, or money to buy them. But something in the young man won confidence and credit. There was at Wilmington a printer, Andrew Stuart, who had fallen into disfavor and was about to leave the town. He had a press and three small fonts of letters for sale. Some gentlemen of Wilmington offered to advance money on a long credit to enable Thomas to make the purchase. Stuart, sensible that Thomas could not get a press and types elsewhere, asked about three times as much for them as they cost when new. After some chaffering he came down to about double the cost price. Finding that Thomas could raise the money he insisted upon including in the sale a negro woman and

her child. Thomas concluded to take press, types, woman and child, when the seller insisted upon adding to the sale his household furniture. This broke off the negotiation, and when Stuart relented it was too late. Thomas had become discouraged at the aspect and business look of the place. The little money he had was gone, and his desire to go to England revived. Though a merchant of Wilmington offered to send to London for printing apparatus by the first opportunity, neither this, nor the landlady's tender of partnership, had power to detain him.

To reach England being still his prevailing wish, he engages as steward on board the brig in which he came as a passenger from Boston, and which was now to sail for the West Indies, with the hope of readily finding his way from the West Indies to London. The change of relation from passenger to steward seems to have worked a sudden change in the feelings of the captain of the brig. Thomas finds the labors of his new position hard and disagreeable. Twice he is sent in a boat up the river with slaves fresh from Africa to procure lumber. The captain requires him to attend him on shore with a lantern and to wait on him as a servant. The young man's pride, and he had a good stock of it, revolts at this treatment, and he determines that he will not go with him. The will with him was apt to find the way. He rose soon after midnight, "dressed himself in his long clothes" and sat on the quarter deck wishing, like Paul and his fellow voyagers, for the day. He recollects at the moment a letter of recommendation which had been given him by a gentleman in Newport to Robert Wells, a printer in Charleston, South Carolina. He leaves the brig with the first break of dawn and goes in search of a vessel bound for Charleston. He finds a packet that is

to sail in three days, engages a passage, and then seeks the captain of the brig and asks for a dismission from his service, which the captain very reluctantly grants. After the dismission, the captain was again quite friendly, and assisted him in procuring some provisions for the voyage. He had been employed some ten days in the service of the brig without visiting the lady of the coffee house. He goes to see her and meets with the same kind reception as before. The project of the partnership is renewed, and he is to go to Charleston, work till he could provide materials for his printing house, and then return to Wilmington to put his plan into execution. He goes on board the packet. As it was about leaving the wharf, the lady sends by her maid a present of stores for the voyage. She lived but a few steps from the wharf, and he must needs step on shore and thank her for the kindness. As he is conversing with her, he sees the packet under way, and leaving his thanks half paid, he runs to the wharf, but the vessel had gone. He hastens to a lower wharf, but is too late. He meets the captain of the brig, who befriends him in his distress, takes his own boat with two men and after rowing an hour, the weather being calm, overtakes the packet and puts him on board.

The packet had a slow passage down the river. After its arrival at Fort Johnson it was detained a week by head winds. The provisions were exhausted and a contribution was called for to get a new supply. Thomas was obliged to borrow a dollar to make up his share. The captain had to send back a boat thirty miles to procure the supplies. On their arrival they set sail and had a quick passage to Charleston. The young man's mortification does not end here. He has no money to pay his passage; he leaves his

chest in pledge and hurries on shore to find employment. In the space of two hours he had visited all the printers in Charleston in fruitless search of work. They were, however, very kind to him. One of them, Mr. Couch, invites him to dine with him and to make his house his home, working as he pleased "till he could better himself."

Soon after he receives an offer of small wages from Mr. Wells and accepts it. Applying himself closely and diligently to his work, after ten days he asks of his employer seven dollars and goes in search of the packet to redeem his chest. He is dismayed to find that the packet had already returned to Wilmington. Upon further inquiry he learns that his chest is stored in the warehouse of the owner of the packet. He pays his passage money and the dollar he had borrowed, and is as happy as if a fortune had poured her full horn into his lap. His skill in his art and steady application won the good will of Mr. Wells, who raised his wages. He continued in his service till he left Charleston.

Mr. Robert Wells, an excellent printer and good man, was the publisher of the *South Carolina and American General Gazette.* He kept also what was for the time an extensive bookstore, supplying the wants of both the Carolinas. He was a loyalist and supported the government, but the friendly relations between him and young Thomas were never disturbed. The young man had an opportunity to improve in his art and freedom of access to books which he had never before enjoyed. Little is known of his sojourn at Charleston. His promise to the fair keeper of the Coffee House seems to have been too easily forgotten. The present of supplies for the voyage and the half uttered thanks are the last we hear of her; she passes into the silence. Some

things and scenes he saw at Charleston made fast hold upon his memory; the arrival and inauguration of the statue to William Pitt; the burning at the stake of two negroes, man and woman, for the crime of poisoning their master, with the multitudinous sea of upturned black faces; an election of members of the assembly with candle light processions and temporary hospitals for the inebriated; the meeting with several Bostonians who had left their native town, as he expresses it "for the sin of being in debt."

While at Charleston, in December 1769, Mr. Thomas was married to Mary Dill, daughter of Joseph Dill of the isle of Bermuda. The connection was not a happy one, and he was separated from her a few years afterward. He had a plan of going to settle in the West Indies; it was nearly perfected, but his health failing, after a short tour among the Southern Colonies, he came back to Boston in the spring of 1770.

The condition of Boston in the early months of that year is matter of familiar history. It was then a town of not more than twenty thousand inhabitants, intelligent, wealthy, energetic, self reliant, loving the mother country when the mother country did not meddle with their affairs. The political controversies which had sprung up (from seeds long in the soil) soon after the close of the seven years war, had now for seven years been enlarging their scope and increasing in intensity and bitterness. Discussion had served only to widen the differences of opinion and policy. The growing claim, a natural growth, of the colonies for self government, was met by a larger claim for power and restraint on the part of parliament and the crown. Upon this town, sensitive and jealous of its rights, the British ministry had, in the autumn of 1769, quartered

some nine hundred troops. The contention, hot enough before, was brought to white heat by the personal collisions of the populace and soldiers. What history has called, without much propriety, the "Boston Massacre," was a probable, natural result of the attempt to overawe such a people by military force. There was not room on the little peninsula, physical or moral, for soldiers and people.

Such was the excited state of the capital, and such indeed that of the province of Massachusetts Bay, when Mr. Thomas came back, to begin life for himself. With his temperament and convictions he could not long keep out of the thickest of the fight; and no suggestion of fear, or foreboding of loss or peril to himself, ever held him back.

In the July following, Mr. Thomas formed a partnership with Mr. Fowle. We must, I think, find in this fact some mitigation of the judgment he has passed upon his old master. The firm commenced business in Salem street by issuing, in July 1770, the first number of a small newspaper called the *Massachusetts Spy*. This number was distributed gratuitously through the town. The paper was to be published three times a week, twice on a quarter sheet and once on a half sheet. The frequent issue of the paper, a new thing in Boston, was not to meet the commercial or business needs of the town. It was thought it would meet the wants of mechanics and other classes of people who had each day but little time to read, and to whom the news and instruction of the paper would be convenient in small doses. The second number of the paper was published on the 7th of August 1770. The publication was continued in this form for three months. The partnership of Fowle and Thomas was then dissolved, Thomas buying of Fowle the same press and types on

which he had worked as a child. They had been purchased by Fowle nineteen years before, had been paid for by borrowing the money of a relative who was content to let the principal lie, if he was paid punctually the interest. Thomas became the owner by giving to the creditor new security for the payment of the loan. He moved his office to School street, and changed the publication of the *Spy* from three times to twice a week, each number a half sheet. He continued the publication in this way for three months more, and then dropped it to make preparations for the weekly publication of a larger newspaper than had before been printed in Boston. On the 7th of March 1771, from his printing office, now changed to Union street, the new weekly appeared, printed on a whole sheet royal size folio of four pages; but not Cowper's folio of four pages, "happy work which not even critics criticize." In the new form the paper had to start with less than two hundred subscribers. After the first week the number rapidly increased, till, at the end of two years, the subscription list was larger than that of any other newspaper in Boston.

The new sheet bore the name of the *Massachusetts Spy*. The title was between two cuts, on the left the Goddess of Liberty, on the right two infants culling flowers from a basket. Nothing could be ruder, less artistic, than these prints; but that on the left had its meaning for the time, soon after made clearer by the motto from Addison's Cato.

> "Do thou, great Liberty, inspire our Souls,
> "And make our lives in thy possession happy,
> "Or our deaths glorious in thy just defence."

It was with the publication of this paper that our printer really entered upon his own career of life. It was in this

work that he was able to render valuable service to his country and to connect his name with its history. With it, though its place of publication was changed, he was connected for thirty years, and, after many trials and reverses, it laid the foundation of his fortune.

Mr. Thomas was printer, publisher, and editor. A number of writers however supplied the paper with political essays. Some of the earlier essays were intended to be especially adapted to that class of citizens who had made up the majority of the early readers of the *Spy*. "Common sense in common language," said Mr. Thomas, "is necessary to influence one class of citizens as much as learning and elegance of composition to produce an effect upon another: the cause of America was just, and it was only necessary to state this cause in a clear and impressive manner to unite the American people in its support." We incline to think that elegance of composition, rhetoric, and eloquence, are as agreeable to one class of citizens as to another. Whether this be so or not, the distinction suggested by Mr. Thomas was not kept up. The *Spy* circulated throughout the continent, and its writers addressed alike all classes of the people. At the start the publisher opened the columns of the paper to Whigs and Royalists, but the controversy had become too warm for such a course; it satisfied neither party. Overtures were made by friends of government to induce the printer to enlist the *Spy* in its defence. They were of course rejected, and Mr. Thomas gave the paper without reserve to the cause of the people.

In an early number there is a pretty explicit statement of the relation of rulers and people. "Rulers are made for the people, not the people for the rulers. The people are bound to obey the rulers, when the rulers obey the laws;

and when the rulers are affectionate fathers, the people are bound to be dutiful children. Rulers were instituted to be servants to the people, and ministers of God for good; but if instead of servants they become masters, and instead of ministers for good they are ministers for evil, they are no longer rulers according to their institution. Rulers are appointed to be the representatives of God among men; and when they imitate him in righteousness the people are under the strongest obligations to give them great honour and reward. The people always have a right to judge of the conduct of their rulers, and reward them according to their deeds."

The *Spy* soon became a power in the Massachusetts Bay, for it was conducted with vigor, zeal, and entire devotion to Whig principles. The government hoped to buy the young printer; he was not in the market. It tried to drive him; he could not be driven. It tried to alarm him; he was without fear. It tried to suppress him; but he baffled and defeated every attempt to this end and gained new strength and influence by every conflict.

The proposal to make the *Spy* a loyalist paper having failed, the next step was to force compliance or deprive the printer of his press and types. His creditor was an officer of the Crown, and, though a worthy man, was pushed on to demand payment of the debt contrary to his verbal agreement. Thomas had given a bond payable in one year, with an assurance that the principal should not be called for if the interest was promptly paid. Thomas, though without property, had the confidence and credit of his friends; he borrowed the money and paid the old debt by contracting a new one. The plan of suppression failing, the most paltry attempts were made to annoy

him and impair the value of his paper. One of these was a refusal to permit him to obtain from the Custom House an account of the arrivals and clearances of the port of Boston. The printer of the *Massachusetts Gazette*, and *News-Letter*, acknowledges that he had refused Thomas a copy of the list, under the influence of the Custom House officers. Thomas also charges Governor Hutchinson with attempting to get work out of his hands and give it to a tool of his own, and with saying of the *Spy* "Long ago would I have stopped the press could I but have persuaded the council to join with me." "A man" the editor adds "whom we could not more disgrace than by saying he is, and *how he became* the g——r of this p——e."

The *Spy* had among its contributors several able and pungent writers who did not put on their gloves when they wrote. Among the early contributions was a series of essays signed Centinel, extending to over forty numbers, the first with a motto from the ballad of Chevy Chase.

> "The child that is unborn
> Will rue the hunting of that day."

I have not been able to discover the writer of these essays. John Adams evidently knew the author, but he gives no clue. The question puzzled Governor Hutchinson. They are written with much learning and marked ability. In vindicating the liberties of the people of the province the writer does not confine himself to the charter, or their rights as English subjects, but lays for them deeper and broader foundations in the natural rights of man. The manner is clear, incisive, bitter, without the least recognition of the doctrine that the powers that be are ordained of God.

But the boldest of the writers for the *Spy* was Joseph Greenleaf, over the signature of Mutius Scævola. In the *Spy* of November 14th 1771, he declares that Hutchinson is not the legal governor of the Province, that he is an usurper and ought to be dismissed and punished as such. We give one or two brief extracts. "An Englishman should never part with a penny but by his consent, or the consent of his agent or representative, especially as the money thus forced from us is to hire a man to tyrannize over us, whom his master calls our governor. This seems to me to be Mr. Hutchinson's situation, therefore I cannot but view him as an usurper, and absolutely deny his jurisdiction over this people, and am of opinion that any act of assembly consented to by him in his capacity as governor is *ipso facto* null and void and consequently not binding upon us. * * * * * *

"If the pretended Governor or Lieutenant-Governor by being independent on us for their support are rendered incapable of completing acts of government, it is time we had a lawful one to preside or that the pretended governors were dismissed and punished as usurpers, and that the council, according to charter, should take upon themselves the government of the province." The article caused no little stir and excitement in the Bay.

The *Evening Post* of the next Monday says, "it is said the piece referred to, from its nature and tendency, is the most daring production ever published in America." The *Post* refers to, without venturing to print it.

The paper was printed on Thursday. On Friday afternoon Governor Hutchinson convened his Council. The Council, after deliberating upon the matter till sundown, adjourned to the next day, when they met again, and after

further discussion, resolved that the printer should be sent for. The messenger of the Council appeared in Mr. Thomas's office and told him that his presence was required in the Council chamber. Mr. Thomas replied that "he was busily employed in his office and could not wait upon his Excellency and their Honors." An hour later the messenger again appeared and informed him that the Governor and Council awaited his attendance, and by their direction he (the messenger) asked whether Mr. Thomas was ready to appear before them. Thomas answered that he was not. The messenger went to make report, and Thomas went for legal advice — the tradition is, to John Adams. He was instructed to persist in his refusal to appear before the Council, that they had no right to summon him before them. The messenger was sent a third time and brought this order. "The Governor and Council order your immediate attendance before them in the Council chamber."

T. I will not go.

Mess. You do not give this answer with the intention that I should repeat it to the Governor and Council?

T. Have you anything written by which to show the authority under which you act?

Mess. I have delivered to you the order of the Governor and Council as it was given to me.

T. If I understand you, the Governor and Council *order* my immediate attendance before them?

Mess. They do.

T. Have you the order in writing?

Mess. No.

T. Then, sir, with all due respect to the Governor and Council, I am engaged in my own concerns and shall not attend.

Mess. Will you commit your answer to writing?

T. No, sir.

Mess. You had better go, you may repent your refusal to comply with the order of the Council?

T. I must abide by the result.[1]

Upon the return of the messenger with this unexpected and firm refusal, the Governor and Council deliberated whether they should not commit the printer for contempt. Two difficulties were suggested. First, he had not appeared before them; if he had, his answers might have been construed as contempt of the Council. The other was yet graver and went to the root of the matter, that the Council could not compel his appearance before them to answer for any crime or misdemeanor; the judicial tribunals alone having jurisdiction and cognizance of criminal offences. If these considerations had had their just weight before, instead of after, the refusal, the Governor and Council would have escaped the mortification of being baffled and defied, by a young mechanic of twenty-two, on a question of law and right. So a more careful examination of the article itself would have disarmed it of its force. For the ground upon which Governor Hutchinson is denounced as an usurper is that he receives his salary from the Crown and not from the Province. The fact itself was well known, and as to the conclusion the Governor and Council might well have said *valeat quantum*, it is worth what it is worth.

In judging of the conduct of Thomas we are not to forget, that he had often heard from his master how his brother Daniel Fowle, a few years before, had been imprisoned by the General Court among thieves and

[1] The conversation is given from memoranda made at the time by Mr. Thomas.

murderers, denied the sight of his wife, or the means of communicating with his family, for an alleged libel upon the General Court; and how James Franklin had been imprisoned and forbidden to publish his paper for the same reason.

Governor Hutchinson was, it would seem, too good a lawyer not to have seen that the Governor and Council had no legal power in the matter. When, in 1774, notice was given him that the House of Representatives proposed to present to the Council articles of impeachment against Chief Justice Oliver, he replied that "he knew of no crimes, misdemeanors, nor offences, that were not cognizable before some judicatory or other; and he knew of no criminal case of which the Governor and Council, as a court of judicature, could take cognizance."

Defeated in their attempt, the Governor and Council ordered the Attorney General to prosecute the printer for a libel. Great efforts were made to accomplish the object. The Chief Justice (Lieutenant Governor Oliver) at the following term of the Court in Boston, in his charge to the Grand Jury, dwelt largely on the doctrine of libels, the licentiousness of the press, and the necessity of restraining it. The Attorney General drew up an elaborate bill of indictment against Isaiah Thomas for a libel, but the Grand Jury refused to find it; they said "*ignoramus*." Foiled in this second method, the Attorney General was directed to file an information against Thomas. The fact became known, and the legality of the course was so bitterly attacked, and with such force of argument and authority, that it was thought best to drop the matter. The effort to prosecute in Suffolk failing, one other expedient was suggested. The *Spy* was circulated throughout the province.

Wherever the paper circulated the libel was published, and in the view of the law it was as truly published in Essex as in Suffolk. Let the printer be indicted in Essex, where the people are as yet more faithful and loyal to his Majesty, and his Majesty's faithful servants, the Governor and Council of the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Mr. Thomas states that the fallacy of this argument was made apparent. The legal view was perhaps sound enough, but the prosecution was not instituted. The Governor and Council had learned prudence, or had become satisfied that Essex also was growing seditious.

While these measures were being taken against the printer, the Governor and Council proceeded with more rapid steps against the writer of the article, Mr. Greenleaf. A written order was served upon him to appear on the 10th of December before the Governor and Council to be examined touching a certain paper, called the *Massachusetts Spy*, published the 14th of November 1771. Greenleaf paid no heed to the summons, and on the 12th of December an order appeared in the *Boston Newsletter*, the Court Gazette, dismissing him from his office of Justice of the Peace for the county of Plymouth. The order was as follows:

"At a Council held at the Council Chamber in Boston, Tuesday Dec. 10th, 1771.

His Excellency having acquainted the Board, at their last meeting, that Joseph Greenleaf Esq. a Justice of the Peace for the county of Plymouth, was generally reputed to be connected with Isaiah Thomas in printing and publishing a newspaper called the *Massachusetts Spy*, and the said Joseph Greenleaf having thereupon been summoned to attend the Board on this day, in order to his examination touching the same, and not attending according to sum-

mons, it was thereupon unanimously advised, that the said Joseph Greenleaf be dismissed from the office of a Justice of the Peace, which advice was approved of and consented to by his Excellency; and the said Joseph Greenleaf is dismissed from the said office accordingly.

A true copy from the minutes of the Council.

Thomas Flucker, Secretary."

These attempts to restrain the *Spy* were not merely abortive, they kindled the editor to greater zeal for the country's cause, and to intenser hatred of its oppressors.

But bitter as was the tone of the *Spy*, it is a striking fact that the tone of English papers and of prominent English statesmen upon the course of the Ministry toward the colonies was as severe and relentless as that of the Colonial press and statesmen. In the *Spy* of September 10th, 1772, appeared an address to the King, signed Akolax. Upon its appearance the Governor and Council ordered the Attorney General to prosecute the printer in *what manner he thought best.* The notice Thomas took of this was to republish in the *Spy* of Oct. 10th, 1772, an address to the King copied from the (English) *Middlesex Journal.* He calls attention to the fact that the latter address, far more disloyal in its tone and spirit, had passed unnoticed not only in England but on its republication in a neighboring province. He thereupon charges that the purpose and order of the Governor and Council to prosecute him were malicious, closing a bitter article with the words " we may next have padlocks on our lips and fetters on our legs, or FIGHT OUR WAY TO CONSTITUTIONAL FREEDOM." The original letter, and the republication from the *Middlesex Journal*, were alike offensive to the officers of the Crown. Mr. Thomas was in-

formed by friends on whom he relied, that Governor Hutchinson had remarked that to secure a verdict against him stronger ground would be taken than in the case of Mutius Scævola. What this stronger ground was, must be left to conjecture. It would seem as if no weapon had been left unused. The difficulty was insuperable. He could not find a grand jury to indict or a petit jury to convict.

For some two years before these events men had seen the noble mind of James Otis o'erthrown, and

> "That noble and most sovereign reason
> Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh."

It was before the republication of the most obnoxious of the addresses to the King that Mr. Otis called upon Mr. Thomas and desired to have a private conference with him, in what he called his *sanctum sanctorum*, a private room up two flights of stairs, and adjoining the printing office, which the tories called the "sedition foundry." Being seated, Mr. Otis called for two sheets of paper. He doubled each sheet, and after putting them together indented them at the top. On one of the sheets he wrote his own signature, and requested Mr. Thomas to sign the second. He folded the latter carefully, put it in his pocket, leaving the other with Mr. Thomas, and, assuring him he should hear from him, went out.

After the publication of the letters to the King and the report that Thomas was to be prosecuted Mr. Otis came again, apparently composed and in the possession of his reason. He said to Mr. Thomas that he had heard of the publication of the address and of the impending prosecution. The address he had not read. Mr. Thomas gave it

to him, and sitting down he read it very attentively. After reading it once he went over it again paragraph by paragraph, repeating at the end of each there is no treason in that. When he came to a particular passage, he paused, read it again and again, and after pondering upon it some time exclaimed, "Touch and go, by G—d." Having read the address entirely through again, he assured Mr. Thomas that the whole of it was defensible, and in case the prosecution should take place, he would come forward in his defence without fee or reward, or would point out to his counsel the ground of defence, which, in his opinion, ought to be assumed. On taking leave he said "James Otis still retains some knowledge of law." This is what Hutchinson would have called "one of the flashes of our firebrand."

The character of the *Spy*, its bold, defiant tone, and the attempts at prosecution successfully baffled, drew attention to the young printer in all parts of the continent. In North Carolina, the loyalists caused the *Spy* to be burned by the common hangman, and the printer to be burned in effigy. On the other hand applications were made to Mr. Thomas from the Whigs in different parts of the continent to set up presses, one even coming from Quebec. The hostility of the loyalists of the Province was bitter in the extreme. After the passage of the Boston Port Bill and the arrival of additional troops he was frequently threatened with violence. A British officer, whom he had befriended, informed him that his assassination even had been proposed. The following incident illustrates very well the state of feeling among the soldiers. A countryman, Thomas Ditson Jr. of Billerica, was charged with attempting to purchase of a soldier his musket, and thus enticing him to

steal and sell the property of the King. Ditson declared that a plan had been laid to entrap him and that he was innocent of any bad intention. Col. Nesbitt of the 47th Regiment gave Ditson a mock-trial, then stripped him of his clothes and, coating him from head to foot with tar and feathers, carted him through the streets. The soldiers, with the Colonel at their head, halted before the office of the *Spy*; the music playing the rogues march, and some of the soldiers crying out, the printer of the *Spy* shall be the next to receive this punishment. Other illustrations of the state of feeling towards the printer of the *Spy* abound.

In the *Boston Evening Post* of September 19th, 1774, is printed a circular letter, which was scattered among the forces, addressed "to the officers and soldiers of His Majesty's troops in Boston." After giving a list of the authors of the rebellion, Samuel Adams, Bowdoin, Hancock, and others, it says "The friends of your King and Country and of America hope and expect from you soldiers, the instant rebellion happens, that you will put the above persons to the sword, destroy their houses and plunder their effects. N. B. Don't forget those trumpeters of sedition, the printers Edes and Gill, and Thomas."

It would not be easy to over estimate the services Mr. Thomas rendered the country as the editor and printer of the *Spy*. He gave the paper and he gave himself without reserve to the cause of freedom. He well understood that if the cause failed he would be one of the earliest victims. He led no man to risk and peril he did not incur himself. Reading the *Spy* now in the quiet of the library, and in the quiet of peace, one would find much in matter and manner to criticize. But revolutions are not fed and nurtured upon milk and water, or even the clear milk of

human kindness. Contests are bitter when men are struggling for life or all that makes life worth the living.

Rev. Dr. John Eliot in an article in the collections of the Historical Society of 1799 (vol. 6), avers that a more violent class of politicians filled the *Spy* with their speculations than the Whigs who wrote in the *Boston Gazette*. Referring especially to the articles signed Centinel, which we have already noticed, he says any one who reads them will now see that the same spirit and principles lead to a dissolution of all Society, and are, like more modern publications *on equality and the rights of man*, direct attacks on all authority and law. We have read them without reaching this conclusion. Allowance must be made for the difference of things in 1771, and 1799. It is doubtless true, speaking in general terms, that the writers of the *Spy*, as compared with those of the *Gazette*, assumed more radical ground and claimed, at an earlier date, for the colonists not only the rights of Englishmen but the rights of man. Perhaps the position of our printer cannot be better indicated than in the superscription of a letter now before me, addressed, April 4th 1775, by John Hancock from the Provincial Congress then sitting at Concord; "To Mr. Isaiah Thomas, Supporter of the Rights and Liberties of Mankind."

The *Spy* early took the ground which the controversy ultimately assumed, and which gives to it its highest dignity and its most profound interest in the history of human progress. When the *Spy* entered upon the controversy, the gulf, at first narrow between the parties, had been widened and deepened. Substantially the question had become this, the unlimited power of Parliament on the one hand and the rights of self government on the other. The dis-

tinction between internal taxes and external had lost its hold upon the popular mind. While the power of regulating commerce was in abeyance, or the laws to enforce it so readily and so commonly evaded, the Colonies were content. The moment they should have been brought into full activity submission would have been at an end. Indeed it was through the partial exercise of this power to regulate trade that the Colonies had suffered their heaviest *practical* grievances.

All revolutions outgrow and leave behind them the issues on which they are started. When the power of Parliament to regulate the trade of the Empire began to be fully understood, when the colonial statesmen saw what had been already the restrictions its exercise had imposed upon the commerce and manufactures of the Colonies and their growth and expansion, when they understood clearly that in the future the interests of the Colonies were to be subordinated to those of the mother-country, and her wealth and prosperity to be secured at the cost of their own, they began to see that it was this very power they had most reason to dread and to contest.

The course pursued by Parliament and the Crown had brought the Colonies into concert and union of action and to a sense of their power and strength, and when that began to be felt, the question of separation was one of time only. The Colonies found, as Montesquieu expresses it, that "they had grown to be great nations in the forests they were sent to inhabit."

Governor Pownal had said truly, that "it was essential to the preservation of the empire to keep the Colonies disconnected and independent of each other, that they must cohere in one centre (the mother country), and that they

must be guarded against having or forming any principle of coherence with each other above that whereby they cohere in this centre." Coherence and Union of their own motion he deemed utterly improbable, and so great in fact were the differences of the colonies in their settlements, in their charters and frames of government, in their manners, religion, culture, trade and domestic policy, that Franklin, who best understood the subject, said, that nothing but the oppression of the mother country would ever unite them. In seeking for a policy and institutions fitted to their then condition they were led to look beyond their rights as colonists to their rights as men.

But to return to the *Spy*. If it be true, as I think cannot fairly be denied, that its doctrines struck at the roots of the power of Crown and Parliament, insisting that the time of swaddling clothes had long since past, it was only a little early, possibly a little premature, in assuming the position to which the colonies were finally brought. That in times of revolution extravagant doctrines should be advanced by some of the writers in its columns, history would lead us to expect. It must be admitted also that the tone of the *Spy* was bitter, sarcastic, sometimes fierce, defiant and exasperating to the last degree; but in this regard it but showed "the age and body of the time, its form and pressure." One has but to glance at the newspapers to see how the questions at issue engrossed the public attention, how little space is given to, how little apparent interest is taken in, the news of the day, and how the columns are crowded with elaborate essays upon questions of abstract right and law. Never was a people better instructed in matters of right and duty. The questions of natural right were more easily understood, and touched and moved more

deeply the mind and heart of the people. In this regard the *Spy* had signal advantage.

In doing justice to the *Spy* we would do no injustice to the *Boston Gazette*, with which Mr. Eliot compares it. The articles in the *Gazette*, perhaps, as a general rule indicated more literary culture in the writers; their historical and legal arguments were more elaborate and finished. It would be a mistake to suppose that the articles in the *Gazette* were less personal, bitter and inflammatory, than those of the *Spy*. There was for example a series of papers in the *Gazette*, beginning December 20th 1772, entitled *Needham's Remembrancer* written by Josiah Quincy Jr., the noblest Roman of them all. Nothing in the columns of the *Spy* is more bitter, not to say ferocious, than some of these articles. As the discussion and controversy went on the writers for the *Gazette*, as well as those of the *Spy*, are from to-day expanding the claims of the colonies for self government, and narrowing and restricting the powers of Parliament and Crown — rising rapidly to the plane on which the controversy was finally placed. It was self-government to which our fathers were tending, it may be at the first unconsciously, but nevertheless tending. History, from 1763, is a prophesy of the result. It was becoming necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which connected them with another, and to assume among the nations of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitled them.

Mr. Thomas would have been the last person to question the merits of the *Boston Gazette*. He was a rival, but a generous one. "During the long controversy" he remarks "between Great Britain and her colonies no paper

on the continent took a more active part in defence of the country or more ably supported its rights than the *Boston Gazette.*"

We can hardly help glancing at the future fortune of the *Gazette* and its principal proprietor, Benjamin Edes. After the Revolution it lost its great contributors and its tone and policy were changed. It bitterly opposed the adoption of the constitution of the United States and the administration of Washington. The paper declined in power, interest and popular favor, till, after a long struggle, in 1798, it was discontinued for want of support. One cannot but be touched by the old man's farewell address. "The Editor of the *Boston Gazette*, after repeated attempts to prosecute his professional occupation in the declining period of his life, is at length obliged to relinquish his exertions and to retire to those melancholy paths of domestic embarrassments to which misfortune has consigned him. While thus passing the gloomy valley of old age and infirmity, his consolation still rests on that staff which can support a mind conscious of its own rectitude; and though he often feels the thorns and briers on the road, goading him in his passage, yet he patiently suffers under these afflictions, hoping that ere long he shall arrive at that peaceful abode 'where the weary are at rest.' The cause of Liberty is not always the channel of preferment or pecuniary reward. The little property which he acquired has long since fell a sacrifice; the paper-evidences of his services were soon consumed by their rapid depreciation, and the cares of a numerous family were too powerful to be resisted, though he fed them with property at four shillings and sixpence in the pound, which he faithfully and industriously earned at twenty shillings."

Mr. Buckingham, in his very interesting reminiscences of printers and editors, thus speaks of the unfortunate old man. "In 1801, I had occasion to call on him at his printing room and found him at work on a small job at the case, while an elderly female (probably one of his daughters) was at the press striking off shop bills. The venerable form of the old man setting types "with spectacles on nose," and the singular sight of a woman, beating and pulling at the press, together with the aspect of destitution that pervaded the whole apartment, presented a scene well adapted to excite sympathy, and to make an impression on the mind, which the vicissitudes of fifty years have not effaced. At length the infirmities of age overcame his physical powers and the curse of poverty lay heavily on his spirit. Oppressed with years and sickness, neglected and forgotten by those who enjoyed the blessings he had helped to secure, he died in December 1803 at the age of eighty years."

July 1st 1773, nearly two years before he left Boston, Mr. Thomas sent out the prospectus of the *Royal American Magazine*, to be issued monthly. The vessel containing the types for it was cast ashore on Cape Cod, and the first number (for January 1774) was not in fact issued till Febry. 6th 1774. After six months, "on account of the distresses of the town of Boston," Mr. Thomas suspended the publication. It was however purchased by Joseph Greenleaf, the Scævola of the *Spy*, and continued till March 1775. A singular feature of the magazine, considering the relation of both Thomas and Greenleaf to Governor Hutchinson, is thus stated by the editor. "To complete this plan will be added (to begin at the end of the first number and to continue until the whole is finished, printed

in an elegant manner, on fine paper, and occasionally ornamented with copper plate prints, exclusive of those particularly for the magazine) Governor Hutchinson's History of the Massachusetts Bay; which when finished will be worth the cost of the magazine."

The magazine is illustrated by nineteen engravings, the most of which are by Paul Revere. The first number has the well known view of the town of Boston, with the several ships of war in the harbor.

The last year Mr. Thomas was in Boston, he began the publication of an Almanac. The first number is styled "*Thomas' New England Almanac*, or the *Massachusetts Calendar* for the year of our Lord Christ 1775." Its imprint is "Massachusetts Bay, Boston. . Printed and sold by Isaiah Thomas at the printing office, the south corner of Marshall's Lane near the mill bridge." The Almanac was published by Mr. Thomas from 1775 to 1803, and from 1803 to 1819 inclusive, by his son Isaiah Thomas Jr. There is nothing in these Almanacs calling for especial notice. They aided in making the publisher well known, and some fortunate prophecies or guesses as to the weather gained for it something of the reputation of "old Probabilities." They contained a good deal of useful matter which found its way to places where books were little read. In a number before me, that for 1790, are published the tariff of 1789, the proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, the Federal Register, headed by the President of the United States, "His Highness George Washington Esquire," and the Judiciary Act of 1789. In that of 1791 is the whole of Franklin's *Way to Wealth.*

To resume our story. It was not alone as editor and printer of an influential journal that Mr. Thomas was able

or ready to serve his country. He was personally one of the most active of Sons of Liberty. Wherever work difficult and hazardous was to be done, he was to be found. The meetings of the patriots are frequently held at his office. After the workmen have retired, the master remains to print hand-bills that are posted throughout the town before morning, to startle the timid and rouse the lethargic. For the five years following his return to Boston his life was a daily warfare. The tone of his paper, its sharp criticisms not only upon the provincial civil officers but upon the conduct and bearing of the military, excited against him hostility personal as well as political. Threats, as before stated, of violence, of assassination even, are frequently made; whether to alarm only cannot now be determined. His friends did not so regard them. They knew he was on the list of the proscribed, and believed he would be among the earliest victims. He sent his family to Watertown to be safe from the perils to which he was daily exposed. For a few days before the battle of Lexington his friends insisted upon his keeping himself secluded. He went to Concord to consult with Mr. Hancock and other leading members of the Provincial Congress. He opened to them his situation, which indeed the Boston members well understood. Mr. Hancock and his other friends advised and urged him to remove from Boston immediately; in a few days, they said, it would be too late. They seemed to understand well what a few days would bring forth. He came back to Boston, packed up his presses and types, and on the 16th of April, to use his own phrase, "stole them out of town in the dead of night." Thomas was aided in their removal by General Warren and Colonel Bigelow. They were carried across the ferry to Charles-

town and thence put on their way to Worcester. Two nights after, the royal troops were on their way to Lexington, and the next evening after, Boston was entirely shut up. Mr. Thomas did not go with his presses and types to Worcester. Having seen them on their way he returned to the city. The conversation at Concord, as well as his own observation, had satisfied him that important events were at hand.

He went out on the night of the 18th of April, to assist in giving notice that the troops were crossing the Charles river. He returned, but was out again by daylight. Crossing the ferry with Dr. Warren he went into a public meeting at Charlestown and urged the arming of the people, and was opposed by one Mr. Russell "on principles of prudence." As one of the minute men, he engages in the fight which was the beginning of the end. At night he goes to Medford. On the morning of the 20th, he makes a flying visit to his family at Watertown, and then starts on foot for Worcester. He is constantly met on his journey by bodies of armed men on their way to Cambridge, anxious to learn even the minutest details of yesterday's fight. After traveling on foot some miles, he meets with a friend who procures him the loan of a horse. Late at night, weary and travel worn, he arrives at Worcester to begin life anew; a good head and stout heart his only capital. Worcester was one of the places where Mr. Thomas had been invited to set up a press. The necessity for a Whig paper in this stronghold of the loyalists had been felt by Colonel Bigelow, the patriot blacksmith soldier and statesman, and the other leading Whigs of the town and county. Mr. Thomas made an agreement to do so early in 1775, but without any purpose of giving up the

press at Boston. The presses and types sent before him were all that were left as the fruit of five years' toil and peril. A sum exceeding three thousand dollars (and a dollar meant something then, though soon to lose its meaning) was due him from subscribers, scattered over the continent. In times of peace most of this would have been collected. It was now worthless. Paper it was hard to get at any price, and the printer's means of purchase, present and prospective, were cut off. The list of Worcester subscribers was less than two hundred, town and county.

Things were at a stand still. On the 24th of April, 1775, Samuel Adams and John Hancock were at Worcester, on their way to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. They were there, some days, waiting the arrival of their colleagues and a military escort. We have no report of the interview between the patriot printer and the patriot statesmen. But on the journal of the Committee of Safety of the Province is this entry, April 29th, 1775. "Letters from Colonel Hancock now at Worcester were read, whereupon voted that four reams of paper be immediately ordered to Worcester for the use of Mr. Thomas, printer; he to be accountable." Though the letter requesting that paper be sent to Mr. Thomas has been lost, a very interesting one written from Worcester by Mr. Hancock, on the evening of his arrival, has been preserved. It is addressed to the Committee of Safety. I have space for a brief extract only. "Boston must be entered, the troops must be sent away or (blank). Our friends are valuable but our country must be saved. I have an interest in that town; what can be the enjoyment of that to me if I am obliged to hold it at the will of General Gage, or any one else. I doubt not your vigilance, your fortitude and resolution." One can-

not but conjecture that the young printer may have seen and read, with delight, that letter before it was put on its way to Watertown.

On the third of May the *Spy* reäppears at Worcester. In his address to his readers the editor says: "I beg the assistance of all the friends of our righteous cause to circulate this paper. They may rely that the utmost of my poor endeavors shall be used to maintain those rights and privileges for which *we* and our fathers have *bled*;" words that on the 30th of May, 1775, were something more than rhetoric. The place of publication was not however definitely settled. Mr. Thomas was directed by the Committee of Safety to bring his press to Concord. He goes there to find that the Provincial Congress had adjourned to Watertown. He goes to Watertown, and is advised by leading members of the Congress that it will be best to remain at Worcester for the present, to do the printing for Congress, the army and Committee of Safety, at that place establishing a post, what we should call an express, between Worcester and Watertown and Cambridge, to transmit orders and return the work when done. Following this course, on the 8th "of May the Provincial Congress appoints a committee to transcribe the narrative of the proceedings of the King's troops on the 19th ult., together with depositions thereof accompanying, to be transmitted to Mr. Thomas for immediate publication."

On the 12th of May the Committee of Safety "voted, that Mr. Isaiah Thomas have sixty reams of printing crown paper and eight reams of printing demy paper supplied to him by the committee of supplies; they taking his obligation to be accountable to the Colony for the amount thereof."

Mr. Thomas did account for the paper sent him to the last penny. Though the Congress and the Committee of Safety assumed to direct his movements, I cannot find that he ever received any favor from them, or sought any. They supplied him twice with paper, and he paid for it by his work. In his day of extremest want he would not feed from the public crib. In the summer, Samuel and Ebenezer Hall moved from Salem and set up a press in Stoughton Hall, Cambridge. Mr. Edes also escaped from Boston and set up a press at Watertown. After their removal, the printing of the Congress and the Committee of Safety passed into their hands. There was no further occasion for the risk and expense of sending their work to Worcester.

With some view and for some purpose, which I have not been able to discover, in the latter part of May, Mr. Thomas started on foot for a journey to New York. So well was the printer of the *Spy* known, so familiar was his story, that innkeepers on the way would receive no pay for meals and lodging, nor boatmen for carrying him across the ferries. From New York he went to Philadelphia to see the members of the Continental Congress. Some of its leaders were personally known to him. He returned to his labors deeply impressed by their wisdom and patriotism, more ready and willing than ever to work for the "righteous cause" to which they were devoting themselves.

Materials are wanting for a connected and detailed narrative of Mr. Thomas's life during the Revolution. The *Spy* is indeed the weekly record of thought and opinion, but he seldom speaks of matters merely personal. A few incidents only can now be gathered up. In May, 1775, the Provincial Congress established a system of post-riders and post-offices to continue until other provision was made by

the Continental Congress or the Province. In the resolve establishing the system Mr. Thomas was appointed Postmaster for Worcester. In the fall of 1775 the Continental Congress established a post-office department for all the colonies; that which had existed under the Crown having been broken up by the disorders of the times. Dr. Franklin was appointed Postmaster, with power to establish such post routes and appoint such deputies as he should think proper. He selected Mr Thomas for the office at Worcester. His commission was several times renewed by Franklin's successors. It was in the year following (1776) that Franklin was at Worcester, and Mr. Thomas first became acquainted with the man to whose history and character his own, in a humble way, had many points of resemblance.

We get some glimpses of Mr. Thomas in the autumn of 1775 and spring of 1776 from the recollections of Benjamin Russell, better known as Ben Russell, afterward the distinguished editor of the *Boston Centinel*, who in August 1775 was carried by his father to Worcester and indentured as an apprentice to Mr. Thomas. The stories which old men tell of their youth are seldom spoiled from lack of condiment. Those of Mr. Russell were always racy. His master, Mr. Russell used to say, was not at that time in very affluent circumstances. During the first year, he with a fellow apprentice slept in a garret over the printing office on the rags that were taken from time to time for the paper maker. Not only his apprentices but the master himself frequently made their meals at the office on bread and milk, bought by the pennyworth at a time.

Mr. Thomas remained at Worcester editing and printing the *Spy* till the spring of 1776, when he leased for a

year a part of his printing apparatus and his newspaper to William Stearns and Daniel Bigelow, two young gentlemen of the Bar of Worcester, intelligent and patriotic, but with no experience in editing, much less in printing a newspaper.

With the small remaining part of his printing materials he went to Salem, with the view of starting business, but "obstructions arising" he sold his press and types and gave up the plan. The nature of the obstructions will be understood when we learn that three writs of attachment were served upon his press and types in a single evening; and that he was compelled to sell them to pay his debts.

In the year 1777 he leased again the *Spy* and his press at Worcester to Antony Haswell. His family, in 1776 and 1777, were living on a small farm in Londonderry, New Hampshire. They must have been dark years to him. How he was employed I have not been able to learn. I only know that he was always industrious, and that, somehow or other, he got through them and supported his family. There was at least one bright day for him in their calendar. While on a visit to Worcester, July 24th, 1776, he read from the porch of the South Church, to an assembly consisting of almost the entire population of that and adjoining towns, the declaration of independence. He may well have had a just pride in the reading of that declaration. He could not fail to see it was grounded on principles he had been among the earliest to espouse and defend. The declaration was received with every demonstration of joy and confidence. The King's arms were taken from the Court House and burned to ashes. The sign was removed from the King's Arms tavern, and a joyful celebration had there in the evening, when twenty-one patriotic toasts were given, and

the punch flowed freely. Russell, who seems to have been leased to Stearns and Bigelow with the press and paper, in describing the affair to Mr. Buckingham said, "we were all so happy we did not know exactly what we did, but we gave full vent to our patriotic feelings till a late hour in the evening. We were a little surprised in the morning to find that about a dozen of us had enlisted as private soldiers in the army; a recruiting officer being then in the town." Mr. Thomas however got him released on the ground that he was not sixteen years of age.

In the spring of 1778, Mr. Thomas returned to Worcester, took possession of his press, and resumed the publication of the *Spy*. Worcester was thenceforth to be his home; in it he was to pass the remainder of his long life. He was very fortunate in the place of his residence. There were disadvantages in doing business so far from the seaboard, but saving this, all else was propitious. Worcester was one of the largest and most beautiful of the inland towns of Massachusetts Bay, indeed of the New England Colonies. The village was then, and for half a century later, on one broad, beautiful street, in a lovely valley environed by hills of gentle ascent and well rounded summits. The view as you entered the village from the east was charming. The long broad street arched with graceful elms; the neat, many of them elegant and spacious, mansions standing back from the way with grass plats or flower beds in front, and shrubbery at their sides, and the general air of comfort, refinement and taste, delighted all travelers. The town was some six miles square, and agriculture its chief pursuit; but it was the shire of the county and in its central village. Within a mile's compass, were gathered the county officers, eminent lawyers, and a number of mer-

chants and traders who supplied the wants of a large surrounding country. It had several large inns, like the Kings Arms, well known throughout the Bay and places of much resort, not only during the terms of the courts, but at all seasons of the year.

John Adams, when its village schoolmaster, has, in his diary, given us some pleasant sketches of society in Worcester some twenty years before our date, and of his taking tea with the Putnams, Greens, Chandlers, and Macartys of the village; a custom not yet obsolete. Then, as ever since, Worcester was distinguished for its agreeable and cultivated society, for the number of its eminent men and attractive and accomplished women. Some members of the older families who had adhered to the crown had left in 1778, but there were new accessions among the Whigs, the Lincolns and Allens, Waldos and Salisburys, to fill their places. But the fact of greatest importance in this new home of the young printer is that it was alive and growing. As well bury a young man at once as plant him in a place that is torpid or retroceding, where the spirit of enterprise and thrift has died out. Few young men are capable of resisting its repressing and becalming influences.

It was a hard time to begin business anew. All business was disordered by a paper currency daily depreciating; materials and labor were difficult to be procured; subscriptions to his paper hard to be got and harder to be collected. Mr. Thomas however started with new resolution and courage which carried him through the war even, with some small measure of pecuniary success. In a few months after his return he was so fortunate as to purchase some new types, which were taken in a vessel from London

and the *Spy* came out in a new dress. Removed from the personal collisions, insults and threats, to which he had been subjected by the officers and soldiers, and their allies in Boston, the tone and temper of the paper, while equally patriotic and firm, were more temperate and impersonal. Many of the loyalists had left the province; those who remained were quiet and inactive. Though Mr. Thomas was the editor, many able writers among the patriots contributed to the columns of the *Spy*. It did an excellent work, not merely by giving accurate information of the progress of the war but in keeping up the hope and trust of the people. The "trumpeter" gave no uncertain sound.

In 1780 Mr. Thomas was drafted as a soldier. He must go or procure a substitute; there was no money commutation. He was felt to be an useful soldier at home that could not be spared from his press; and his apprentice Russell readily consented to go in his place. Russell's term was but six months and he never was in battle. He joined the army at West Point and was one of the guard who attended Major Andre to the place of execution. Upon his return, Mr. Russell thought that in consideration of his service he ought to be discharged from his apprenticeship, and Thomas, though reluctant to part with so good a workman, consented. Mr. Thomas from his return to Worcester in 1778 seems to have gained ground slowly but steadily. The circulation of his paper was extended, and he added to his income a little by job printing. From 1781, and especially after the peace of 1783, his progress was more marked and rapid. New types and better paper were procured for the *Spy*, and it was enlarged to five columns. It was, says Mr. Buckingham, a most competent judge, well conducted and filled with excellent matter. Besides

selections of news and communications on interesting subjects, the whole of *Robertson's History of America*, *Gordon's History of the Revolution*, and large extracts from *Guthrie's Geography*, and other British publications, enriched its pages and made it more valuable than any paper published in Massachusetts."

To the business of editing and publishing a newspaper he added that of printing, publishing and selling books, at the first however in a small way.

For the two years from March 1786 to March 1788 the publication of the *Spy* was suspended, and in its place was printed, in octavo form, the *Worcester Magazine*. The reasons for the suspension were these. In March, 1785, the General Court laid a stamp duty of two thirds of a penny on newspapers and a penny on almanacs. This law revived the memories of 1765, and was so odious that it was repealed before it went into operation. In July, 1785, an act was passed imposing a duty on all advertisements in newspapers printed in the state. This act was thought by Thomas and other printers to be a still greater grievance. "A shackle," says the *Spy*, "which no legislature but ours, in British or United America, have laid upon the press, which when free is the great bulwark of liberty." The act was very unpopular (the only excuse for it was that government must be supported), and was repealed. In April, 1788, the *Spy* reappeared. "The printer has once more the pleasure of presenting to the public the *Massachusetts Spy* or *Worcester Gazette*, restored to its constitutional liberty (thanks to our present legislature) after a suspension of two years."

The *Worcester Magazine* was after all the *Spy* with a new name and form without the advertisements. The

magazine for the two years makes four volumes octavo. In it will be found, with much other interesting matter, very full accounts of the Shays rebellion, and of the proceedings and discussions leading to the formation and adoption of the constitution of the United States. Mr. Thomas, though appreciating and sympathizing with the sufferings of the people, was a firm supporter of the government. In a position with his postriders to obtain early information of the plans and movements of the rebels, he was able to render important aid to the authorities in Boston. He was not by nature rebel or radical. He had a strong love of liberty, of the state and personal, but it was liberty regulated by law.

In the *Spy* and *Magazine* Mr. Thomas supported the adoption of the constitution of the United States. Popular opinion in the county was against it. We observe that he is very careful to publish everything that Washington said or wrote on the subject, and this not only from the unbounded reverence he had for the man but from a sense of the vast influence his voice and judgment would have in determining the question. It is not perhaps too much to say, that the weight of that influence turned the scale. The knowledge that Washington approved of it, the general expectation that he would be called to administer it, conciliated and drew to its support men whose prepossessions were all against it, who found it difficult to reconcile such large central power with local independence and home government. Washington, it is well known, felt a deep interest in the action of Massachusetts. On the last page of the last number of the magazine is a letter of his to a gentleman in Boston (General Lincoln), in which after speaking of the candid and conciliatory

course of the minority of the convention after the vote had been taken, he says: "The adoption of the constitution in Massachusetts will, I presume, have great influence in obtaining a favorable determination upon it in those states which have not yet decided."

No man felt more quickly the invigorating influences of the adoption of the national constitution and the putting into operation the national government than Mr. Thomas. His business was rapidly built up and extended. He embarked in the art or mystery of making and selling books in all its branches. He conducted it with great enterprise, skill and judgment, and as the fruit of these with great success.

He built a large paper mill and made his own paper, he printed books, he established an extensive bindery, and he sold at wholesale and retail his own publications and all new works from the presses at London. His business extended to almost every part of the Union. At one time he had under his control, and that of his partners, sixteen presses constantly employed, seven of them in Worcester. He had five bookstores in Massachusetts, one in Concord, New Hampshire, one in Albany, New York, and one in Baltimore. His business at Worcester alone would be regarded as extensive even in this age of the multiplication of books. Viewed with reference to the time and place, a village then so far in the interior and with so few facilities of communication, it affords striking proof of his business capacity.

In 1788 Mr. Thomas established a printing and bookselling business in Boston, taking with him as partner a former apprentice, Ebenezer T. Andrews, under the firm of Thomas and Andrews. This store was in Newbury street under the sign of Faust's head. It speaks well for Mr.

Thomas that his partners, in almost every instance, were persons who had learned their art and trade with him. A large and successful business was carried on by the firm of Thomas and Andrews. They published from 1789 to 1793, inclusive, the *Massachusetts Magazine*, a monthly devoted to letters and the arts, and illustrated by engravings. It was quite popular and useful in its day; and an examination of it now may serve at least to mark the progress we have made in general culture and in art. The store and printing office in Boston were but a branch of his business. Mr. Thomas remained at Worcester, and his principal establishment was there. It may give some further idea of its materials and resources to state that his, for that day, splendid editions of the Bible, in folio (with fifty copper plates) and quarto, were carried through in a little more than twelve months. He was in fact one of the largest book publishers of his time on either side of the Atlantic. As editor of a newspaper and almanac, as printer, publisher and seller of school books, Bibles, law books, and books of general literature, the name of Isaiah Thomas became throughout the country a household word. His work was remarkable for elegance and accuracy. Rev. Peter Whitney, the historian of Worcester county, says, "his editions of the Bible are found upon examination the most correct of any now extant." The celebrated Brissot (de Warville), the famous Girondist leader, in his travels in the United States in 1788, says: "Nous allâmes diner à Worcester à 48 miles de Boston; cette ville est joue et bien peuplée; l'imprimeur Isaias Thomas l'a rendue célèbre dans tout le continent Americain. Il imprime la plupart des ouvrages que paroissent; et l'on avouer que ses editions sont correctes et bien soignees. Thomas est le *Didot* des

Etats-Unis." A relative of Dr. Franklin, in a letter before me, says: "Being one day in the Doctor's library, I opened an elegant folio Bible and said, this is a most splendid edition. Yes, he said, it was printed by Baskerville, the greatest printer in England, and your countryman Mr. Thomas of Worcester is the Baskerville of America." As England produces now in the art of printing no superior to Baskerville we shall have to give considerable force to the addition "of America." The remark no doubt had something in it of personal kindness. Mr. Thomas had known Franklin for many years. He had been appointed postmaster by him, and Franklin had visited him at Worcester. It would have been enough to have secured Franklin's regard that Mr. Thomas was so good a patriot; his skill in printing was another bond of sympathy. Dr. Franklin, like all printers who have become eminent, retained a great affection for the art. Mr. Thomas saw him for the last time in 1788, when a number of printers and booksellers met at Philadelphia to form some rules for the benefit of the trade. Mr. Thomas and Benjamin Franklin Bache, the grandson of Franklin, were of the number. After the first meeting Mr. Thomas had a long conversation with Dr. Franklin upon the objects of the meeting. Dr. Franklin manifested a deep interest in the matter. Unable to go abroad from the state of his health, he desired to have the next meeting at his own house. The convention of course felt itself greatly honored by such a request, and the Doctor, though suffering constant pain from the calculus, entered freely into the plans and discussions of the meeting. He was then in his eighty-third year, suffering constant bodily pain, but with a mind as vigorous, a wisdom as large and practical, and manners as easy and winning, as in the noon of life.

The man for whom Mr. Thomas had, if possible, a yet higher reverence, Washington, visited Worcester in the course of his New England tour in the autumn of 1789. The *Spy* of October 22d 1789 has a notice of his brief visit. "Information being received on Thursday morning (October 22d) that his Highness would be in town the next morning, a number of respectable citizens, about forty, paraded before sunrise on horseback, and went as far as Leicester line to welcome him, and escorted him into town. The Worcester company of artillery, commanded by Major Treadwell, were already assembled; on notice being given that his Highness was approaching, five cannon were fired for the five New England States; three for the three in the Union; one for Vermont which will speedily be admitted; and one as a call to Rhode Island to be ready before it be too late. When the President General arrived in sight of the meeting house, eleven cannon were fired; he viewed with attention the artillery company as he passed, and expressed to the inhabitants his sense of the honor done him. He stopped at the United States Arms and breakfasted, and then proceeded on his journey. To gratify the inhabitants he politely passed through the town on horseback, dressed in a brown suit, and pleasure glowed in every countenance; eleven cannon were then fired. The gentlemen of the town escorted him a few miles, when they took their leave."

E. Smith Thomas, a nephew of Isaiah Thomas, was then one of his apprentices. "A boy of fourteen," he writes many years afterwards, "I was presented to Washington by my distinguished kinsman, Isaiah Thomas. I can never forget his words or my feelings on the occasion. 'Young man,' he said, 'your uncle has set you a bright example of

patriotism, and never forget that next to our God we owe our highest duty to our country."'

Smith Thomas went to live with his uncle, to learn the art of printing, in 1788. In the reminiscences of his life and times, published in 1840, we find some notices of his kinsman. Speaking of the *Spy*, he says: "Mr. Thomas was a pungent writer, possessing a clear and strong style, with the most biting sarcasm." This is extravagant. "He was constantly aided by the powerful pens of General Ward, Dwight Foster, Edward Bangs, and others, so that his paper, which was a small weekly sheet, was always well filled with matter calculated to confirm the patriotic in their course and prevent the wavering from going over to the enemy." (He had then built his extensive printing office, bookstore and bindery.) "Few gentlemen passed through Worcester without calling to see the proprietor and his establishment, who never failed to treat them with the most marked politeness. In his person Mr. Thomas was tall and elegantly formed, in his dress fashionable to a fault, in his manners elegant, with a mind stored by a most extensive acquaintance with the best authors whether in literature or science." With fair allowance for the relation of the parties and the impression the accomplished master makes on the apprentice, and the teacher on the pupil, the description conforms to the general recollection of Mr. Thomas's contemporaries.

Into the cultivated society of the town, the self educated printer and bookseller made easy way, and in intellectual culture and manners found himself among equals. When his business had expanded, and his income enlarged, he built what was for the time a spacious and elegant mansion,

which during his long life was the seat of an open, refined and generous hospitality.

Mr. Thomas was a supporter of the administration of Washington and of the Federal party. He was not, according to the standard of his times, a bitter partizan, but those were times when men had strong convictions and expressed them clearly, not to say fiercely. We have seen with what ardor and at what peril and sacrifice he maintained the liberties of the colonies — indeed liberty everywhere. The experience of the war and of the seven years of confusion and disorder which followed it, taught him the necessity of a strong, stable, efficient, national government. He believed the constitution had been so framed and adopted, and should be so administered, as to give the country such a government. Under such a government he lived to see his country free, prosperous, happy. In his preface to his edition of the Bible, in 1791, he says: "The general state of our country must afford satisfaction to every benevolent mind. Evidences of increasing prosperity present themselves on every side to our view. Abroad, our national character is rising to dignity and eminence, at home, confidence is established in our government, the spirit of patriotism appears to be the actuating principle with the distinguished characters of our age, and the greatest exertions are making for the public good. The civil and religious rights of men are generally understood, and by all enjoyed. The sciences which open to the minds of men a view of the works and ways of God, and the arts which tend to the support, the convenience, and the ornament of society, begin to receive proper encouragement from the administration of state and national governments; and by the application and enterprise of individuals are

approaching to excellence and perfection. The means of a good education are daily becoming more general, and the present spirit of industry and economy, which pervades all classes of men, furnishes the brightest prospects of future prosperity and welfare. While a general solicitude prevails to encourage the Arts and to promote national honor, dignity and happiness, can any be indifferent to those improvements which are necessary to secure to all the free and independent exercise of the Rights of Conscience? The civil authority hath set an example of moderation and candor to all Christians, by securing equal privileges to all; and it must be their ardent and united wish, independently of foreign aid, to be supplied with copies of the sacred Scriptures — the foundation of their religion — a religion which furnishes motives to the faithful performance of every patriotick, civil and social duty, superior to the temptations of ambition, avarice and selfishness; which opens prospects to the human mind that will be realized when the relation to civil government shall be dissolved, and which will raise its real disciples to their highest glory and happiness, when the monuments of human genius, art and enterprise, shall be lost in the general dissolution of nature."

In 1802 Mr. Thomas relinquished his business in Worcester to his son, who bore his name and shared his tastes. Though he had acquired an ample fortune he was not a man to remain idle. He was not merely a *printer* of books but a *reader*, and early began the collection of a library. Amid the cares of a vast business he always found some time for reading and study. He was strongly attached to the art to which, for nearly half a century, he had been devoted. There was no history of printing in America,

and he would try to supply the want. There was danger that many of the facts would be irrecoverably lost. He had known personally the leading printers of his time and had heard the story of many earlier printers from their successors. No person then living had so much knowledge of the subject, not to be found in books — the unwritten history. But he spares no labor or expense in gathering the materials for his work. The collection of newspapers for the purpose, with those he already possessed, made the largest collection in the country. The modest view of Mr. Thomas was not so much to write the history as to collect and preserve the materials for a history. He "makes no pretence to elegance of diction" but is content with a plain, unadorned statement of facts;" yet there are some of the biographical sketches whose easy, simple and attractive style, reminds us of the greatest American printer, writer, statesman and thinker.

The result of his researches and labors was the *History of Printing*, published in 1810, in two volumes octavo. Upon the value of this contribution to the history of the country I will not enlarge. Its general accuracy and fidelity have been recognized by historians, students, and antiquarians.

In his business as printer and bookseller, in gathering the materials for his history of printing, having a deep personal interest in the annals of a country whose course he had watched, not idly, from colonial dependence to national greatness, a lover and reader of books, touched early by the gentlest of infirmities, bibliomania, he had collected a library especially rich as to the fountains and springs (*fontes et origines*) of American history. His researches had taught him the value of such a collection; his observation

and experience had shown him how quickly the sources of our history were drying up, how rapidly the monuments of the past were crumbling and wasting away. He saw and understood, no man better, from what infinitely varied and minute sources the history of a nation's life was to be drawn; that the only safe rule was to gather up all the fragments so that nothing be lost.

It was in the light of this experience, and with a view to garner up and preserve the materials of our history, that he conceived the plan of the American Antiquarian Society, of making his own library the basis of its collections, and of giving to the cause of good letters a liberal share of the fortune he had acquired in their service. It was in January, 1812, that his intent and purpose of founding the society were first suggested to his friends, the Rev. Dr. Bancroft and Dr. Oliver Fiske of Worcester. In the spring and summer of that year, in consultation with them and other friends, a plan was matured, and on the 12th of October a petition was presented to the legislature of Massachusetts for an act of incorporation. The petition was signed by Isaiah Thomas, William Paine, Levi Lincoln, Nathaniel Paine, Aaron Bancroft, and Edward Bangs. This was in the war, when political strife was bitter, but the cause of letters brought together men who were antipodes in political faith.

On the 19th of October Mr. Thomas went to Boston to wait upon the committee to whom the petition had been referred, and on the 20th a bill was drawn. It passed the House the 23d, the Senate the 24th, and was approved by Governor Strong, and became a law the same day. The petition, in stating the objects of the society, has one line which is the key to the society's history, " to assist the re-

searches of the future historians of our country." The persons incorporated were among the most eminent citizens of the commonwealth in all the walks of cultivated life. The society was organized at the Exchange Coffee House in Boston on the 19th of November 1812, and Mr. Thomas elected president.

At the beginning the annual meetings were held in Boston. On the first, Oct. 23d, 1813, a public address was delivered at the Stone Chapel by the Rev. Dr. Jenks. In 1814 an address was delivered in the same church by Dr. Wm. Paine, and the society was escorted to and from the Chapel by the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company.

The library given by Mr. Thomas, consisting of about three thousand volumes, was kept for eight years in his mansion on Court Hill; he, constantly, we might say daily, adding to its collections. In the fall of 1820, it was removed to Antiquarian Hall, erected for the society by Mr. Thomas at a cost of ten thousand dollars. The first volume of the Collections and Transactions of the society was also prepared and published at his expense.

His interest in the society never abated. He was at work for it diligently and happily to the very close of his ilfe. He was reëlected president till his death. By his will he gave funds for the support of a permanent librarian, and for incidental purposes, amounting in the whole to twenty-four thousand dollars. His entire gifts to the society in books, land, building, and legacies by his will, would not fall short of fifty thousand dollars. His was among the early examples in our country of giving in a man's lifetime, and so giving his own. "Defer not charities till death," says Lord Bacon, "for certainly, if a man weigh it rightly, he that doth so is rather liberal of another man's

than his own." Mr. Thomas's gifts to public uses during his lifetime exceeded those by his will. Indeed, I incline to the opinion that he gave away in his life more than he accumulated. Since Mr. Thomas's death, the society has gone on quietly, without parade, successfully accomplishing the purpose, gradually becoming more and more clearly defined, of collecting and preserving the materials of American history. It has published four volumes of Collections and Transactions, which, where original, are marked with precise learning and thorough research; and, where republications, by careful editing and annotations. It is not too much to say they are most valuable contributions to our history. The library has rapidly increased, so that it has now over fifty-three thousand volumes, reckoning ten pamphlets as a volume. Thanks to the munificence of its present president and other friends, it has now a new library building, and land for its extension, and well invested funds to the amount of eighty thousand dollars.

The services of Mr. Thomas to his country and to letters were appreciated and recognized by his fellow citizens. So far as I can learn, he had no aspirations for political life or official service. The party to whose principles he constantly adhered was in the minority at Worcester during most of his active life. Had it been otherwise, he had neither taste, nor perhaps any peculiar aptitude, for public service. Beside this, though just and kind to others, he liked to do his own thinking, and the free use of lips and pen; and such men are apt to find the post of honor in a private station. In that station he wielded a large influence, and few men of his day were more widely known. He was made a member of many scientific, historical and philanthropic societies throughout the country; among nu-

merous others, the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, the New York Historical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Massachusetts Historical Society. He received the honorary degree of Master of Arts from Dartmouth College, and that of Doctor of Laws from Alleghany College, Pennsylvania.

He died on the 4th of April 1831. His funeral took place on the 7th, when a very interesting address on his life and public services was delivered by Isaac Goodwin Esq. of the Worcester Bar.

This imperfect memoir, the materials for which have been collected with much tribulation, has shown, I hope, that, in three things especially, Mr. Thomas rendered valuable service to his country — as the editor and printer of a newspaper which was an able and fearless advocate of the rights of the colonies and of man, as the author of the *History of Printing*, and as the founder and benefactor of the American Antiquarian Society.

In the relations of townsman, neighbor, friend, we have estimates of his life and character by those who had the fullest opportunity and capacity to judge. The late Governor Lincoln, and this is *laudari ab laudato viro*, in his pleasant reminiscences of the Worcester Fire Society, thus speaks of Mr. Thomas. "With a strong and vigorous mind and a cultivated intellect, enterprise, energy and industry in early life gave him wealth, and possessed of this, he lived in courtly style, and with beneficent liberality. * * * He was a public spirited citizen, generous in his contributions to all worthy objects, and a most efficient coöperator with others in promoting the growth, improvement and prosperity of the place. The city is full of memorials of his good deeds." Perhaps a higher tribute was paid to him by his counsellor

and friend of many years, Samuel M. Burnside, when he said that "Young men, just entering into active life, and engaging in the untried and perplexing mazes of business, seldom looked to him in vain for advice, for patronage, for assistance."

William Lincoln, the accomplished historian of Worcester, familiar with every detail of its record, says: "while his private charity relieved the distresses, his public munificence promoted the improvements of the town." After an enumeration of his benefactions to the municipal corporation he adds, "few local works for the public good were accomplished without the aid of his purse or efforts."

Mr. Lincoln closes his interesting memoir of Mr. Thomas with eulogy not more beautiful than it is just. "The incidents of the life of Dr. Thomas have occupied broad space in these poor annals. His memory will be kept green when the recollection of our other eminent citizens shall have faded in oblivion. His reputation in future time will rest as a patriot on the manly independence which gave, through the initiatory stages and progress of the revolution, the strong influence of the press he directed to the cause of freedom, when royal flattery and favor would have seduced, and the powers of government subdued its action; as an antiquarian, by the minuteness and fidelity of research in the *History of Printing;* as a philanthropist, on the foundation and support of a great national society whose usefulness, with the blessing of Providence, will increase through distant centuries."

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